The Random Reader

A Conscientious Citizen Defines a Problem

Donald Davidson Argues Case of Regionalism

THE ATTACK ON LEVIATHAN: Regionalism and Nationalism in the United States. By Donald Davidson. The University of North Carolina Press. Chapel Hill. $3.

For Americans who look anxiously abroad and wonder when totalitarianism is going to reach "the land of the free," this book has new food for thought.

For Southerners who know how much oppression is posible in this country under the "American Way" it will be to some extent an expression of their own thoughts.

Certainly the book definitely gives the lie to those who would pooh-pooh the Agrarians as vague dreamers, creatures of emotion and memory who have nothing of import to say about this modern world of ours.

Mr. Davidson's objective in this book is to destroy the Leviathan of the imperialistic state—not literally but merely as a concept in the minds of people who have been deluded by the economic determinists of history.

AGRARIANS ASK WHY

For so long we have been told that America's development into our present situation was inevitable because of mysterious laws of economics and sociology. For so long we have been told that all human variety must be sacrificed on the altars of technology and finance capitalism.

The Agrarians, from the moment they ceased to be Fugitives, have asked in one way or another, why? At every turn they have challenged the inevitability of the exploitation.

Now Mr. Davidson has taken the controversy clear into the territory of the economic determinists with sociology and even with the economic standby of statistics he has put them to rout. He has gone into the highways and byways—the valley of Vermont, the red clay of Georgia, the sweeping plains of the Middle West—and returned with overwhelming evidence of cultural, political and economic diversity.

FEDERATION OF REGIONS

His plea is for a federal government in America as opposed to an imperialistic national government. He shows that America is a federation of regions or sections and suggests that it be governed along those lines, or it may not endure to be governed.

Mr. Davidson started out on his present course of thinking perhaps as a protest against the oppression of the South at the hands of the East and Middle West. Since then he has extended his range to a realization of the underlying principles involved. It is a tribute to his integrity and fair play that he sounds a warning against what the West and South may do to the Northeast when and if those sections should "gang up" for political action.

DIGEST OF WORK

This book in a sense is a digest of all previous work done by the Agrarians and other sectional groups of culture in the country. To this, Mr. Davidson has added digests of works on economics and sociology.

The whole is impressive and convincing. In fact the book gains in effect for not being a consecutive and unified work but rather a federation of essays. The writing is now brilliantly satiric, now lucidly expository, and always effectively sincere in its purpose.

DONALD DAVIDSON
Author of
"The Attack on Leviathan"

Nation Entering Great Period Of Debate

Few readers will shut the back flap of this book unconvinced that, as Herbert Agar says, America is reentering a period of great debate like those that preceded the American Revolution or the Civil War. The fundamental issues that the frontier allowed us to ignore in Revolutionary times or that we vainly attempted to settle by warfare in the 1860's are back before us again, and this time we cannot evade them.

LINCOLN CRUELLY WRONG

With the passing decades has come the realization that Abraham Lincoln, far from being right on his house divided, was cruelly wrong, that the house is divided and must be recognized as such if it is to endure.

One of the most impressive things about this book is its author. Mr. Davidson began with the other Agrarians as a poet. Since then he has constantly broadened his medium until he stands forth now as perhaps the most skillful controversialist of the group.

His book gains weight from the fact it was not written by an expert. Mr. Davidson is an expert in poetry and literary matters, but he speaks here merely as a conscientious citizen. He is scholarly and detached, in approach, and he proposes no quick-flip panaceas. Instead he merely defines the problem in such a way that every thinking citizen must take it to heart.

In the great debate to come, every man must weigh his own views carefully. A decade ago this book might have had few readers. But since the debacle of 1929, citizens of America have wakened to their plight and are willing to consider whither we are tending. The welter of conflicting views, theories, and proposals since 1929 are a clear indication that the citizen must listen to the man who defines the issues in fundamentals.—John Thompson.